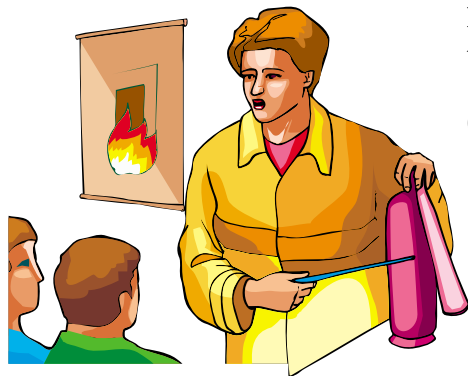


The need for fire safety training



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Passenger safety is the most important priority of transportation. This does not only refer to safe driving, but also concerns emergency situations such as fires. Recently, the transit community in the New Jersey area had two incidents with vehicle fires, one in which a passenger died and another in which every passenger was saved. Proper training can make all the difference in emergency situations.

In the first situation, the driver left the vehicle for help and to attempt to extinguish the fire under the hood. When he realized he could not put the fire out, he then tried to evacuate the passengers only to find he did not have enough time before the vehicle was engulfed in flames. Fortunately, bystanders had stepped in and assisted in getting all but one passenger off the vehicle.

In another instance, the driver followed training procedures. He found the safest and fastest way to pull the bus off the road, remained calm and in control during the situation, and immediately evacuated the passengers from the vehicle. The bus was engulfed by flames soon after.

His quick thinking and previous training saved all of the passengers.

Passenger Service and Safety (PASS), a training program of the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), provides information on how to properly handle emergencies and improve safety for everyone. In the event of the emergency, the driver bears full responsibility for himself and the passengers. In a situation where this is smoke, fire, fuel leak or other immediate onboard danger, the driver must evacuate everyone from the vehicle. It is the driver's responsibility to be calm and take charge. This puts confidence in the passengers that they will be evacuated safely and quickly.

Some situations may be difficult. In a fire, deploying the lift takes too much time and may not work. In a

collision, a wheelchair may have sustained damage and it may not be possible to evacuate a passenger using her wheelchair.

The driver must protect the passengers, him- or herself, and the vehicle, in that order. While the one driver made a valiant attempt at stopping the fire, he cost himself time to remove the passengers. The other driver evacuated his passengers before he did anything else. It is important that drivers be familiar with safety procedures before an emergency occurs. There is not enough time during an emergency to figure out what needs to be done.

Emergency situations happen. Accidents cannot always be avoided. If drivers are prepared and follow emergency procedures, they can better ensure their passengers' safety. ▲

PASS lists four basic accident and emergency procedures:

- 1 *Keep calm.* The driver is the person who must make rational and informed decisions.
- 2 *Protect the passengers, yourself, and your vehicle.* Determine if the vehicle must be evacuated or not. The passengers should be in a safe location and away from danger. Be aware of circumstances around you.
- 3 *Contact the dispatcher.* On vehicles equipped with two-way radios, give the dispatcher your name and location, that an accident has occurred, the number of passengers on board, and whether anyone has been hurt. The dispatcher is responsible for notifying emergency services to respond. Communication between dispatcher and driver should be maintained.
- 4 *Complete the required reports.* It is the driver's responsibility to completely fill out all the necessary paperwork. This is important to process the report quickly and to make sure the driver has a detailed record of the accident.